

A Story That Needs to be Told Again

1 Peter 1:17-23

Introduction

One of the hottest movies in theaters in 2018 was "A Star is Born." Nominated for several Academy Awards and Golden Globe Awards, this movie tells the story of a hard-drinking musician (played by Bradley Cooper) who meets and falls in love with a young singer (played by Lady Gaga).

- That 2018 movie was a remake of a 1976 movie of the same name, starring Barbra Streisand and Kris Kristofferson.
- The 1976 movie was a remake of the 1954 movie (same name) that starred James Mason and Judy Garland.
- The 1954 movie was a remake of the 1951 version starring Conrad Nigel and Kathleen Crowley.
- The 1951 movie was a remake of the 1937 Technicolor version that starred Fredrich March and Janet Gaynor.
- By most accounts, the 1937 movie was based on the true story of Adele Rogers St. John. Or maybe Barbara Stanwyck, depending on which source you believe.

By my count, that's four remakes of the original, which was itself a retelling of someone's story. That's a lot of versions. The story has been told at least six times.

Not related to this movie, but to another remake of another movie, the leading actor said he was glad to be in his particular remake because ...

It's a story that needs to be told again.

A story that needs to be told again. Those who follow Jesus are living a story like that. It is a story that has been told many times through the years. It is a story that needs to be told many more times in this current day and in the years to come.

As I read the three Scriptures that frame this particular worship service I heard that story told three different times and in three different ways:

- In Acts (the first reading), the story is told in a sermon by the Apostle Peter on the Day of Pentecost. It was proclaimed in front of a large crowd people and the telling of it resulted in thousands of people responding to its message.
- In Luke (the Gospel reading), the story was told in a small intimate conversation as three people were taking a long walk together. The result was two people, once uncertain about the truth of the story, now convinced that it was true.
- In 1 Peter (the Epistle reading), the story is told in the form of a circular letter, a relatively short piece of communication between the story teller and several groups living throughout Asia Minor. We have no way to measure the immediate impact of this letter.

The same story, told in three different ways to three different groups.

It's the story of ...

#1: A PEOPLE WHOSE LIVES WERE EMPTY

These people are described in the 1 Peter passage like this:

For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors (1 Peter 1:18)

The writer described how these people thought the lives they were living were full and happy. Later in this epistle he will describe that empty life style:

- As one that is all about themselves
- Do whatever they happen to desire at that moment
- A life involving all kinds of immoral actions and dead end decisions – the kinds of things they usually regret later
- And, amazingly enough, they think what they are doing is “normal” and so they make of people who choose not to live that way.

That empty lifestyle is an approach that has been modeled for them by the people who surround them: their friends, their parents, their grandparents. It's a life-style that has been handed down to them, sometimes for generations, a life-style that has been hard-wired into their very nature. Everyone around them lives that way. So they think they are happy, but deep inside they know they are masking their emptiness with other things.

In the words of the text, these are people who, like slaves, need to be set free.

In the days when these words were written, scholars estimate there were 60 million slaves in the Roman Empire. The law had a provision that slaves could purchase their freedom. The terminology was this: They could redeem themselves. If they could collect enough money, they could be set free. But the price was high, and most slaves could never accumulate the price that needed to be paid. Typically they needed someone else to have compassion on them if they were ever to be set free.

That description of slavery is a historical reality. It's also a spiritual reality. Every person who has ever lived was a spiritual slave. We were born into it, and we've seen it modeled all around us. That spiritual reality results in lives that are broken and empty. At some point even those who see themselves as successful and untouchable will come to face-to-face with the hard reality that their own resourcefulness has a limit. And they've just reached it.

- It might happen as a shocking diagnosis is given to them.
- It might happen as they watch their 401ks shrink into 41ks during these volatile market days.
- It might happen as they experience a tragedy that wipes away all they have accomplished.
- Or it might happen in the quietness of a moment that is undisturbed by all the noise that typically keeps them from facing the truth.

And when that happens ... and it will ... they have to acknowledge what many others have acknowledged before them:

I am in bondage to sin, and I cannot free myself.

But that's not the end of the story. This story that needs to be told again is also a story of:

#2: A GOD WHO CAME TO THE RESCUE

Every good story needs a hero, and this hero is named Jesus. Verse 19 describes Him as ...

... a lamb without blemish or defect (1 Peter 1:19)

... whose precious blood paid the price to free those people who were trapped in slavery.

By calling Christ “a Lamb,” Peter reminded them of an Old Testament teaching that was important in the early church, and that ought to be important to us today. It is the doctrine of substitution: an innocent victim giving his life for the guilty. We see that over and over again in the pages of the Old Testament:

- Animals had to be killed in order to clothe Adam and Eve (Genesis 3)
- A ram died on Abraham's altar instead of his son Isaac (Genesis. 22:13)
- Most notably, every Passover a lamb was slain for each Jewish household (Exodus 12).
- When Jesus began His earthly ministry John the Baptist pointed to Him and said, “Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29)
- Right now the occupants of heaven are singing “Worthy is the Lamb!” (Revelation 5:11–14)

Peter makes it clear in this text that Jesus did not die by accident. His death was part of God's plan to conquer sin, death and the devil. From our human perspective, it appears that Jesus was murdered in an unjust and inhumane way. But the divine perspective is different. Jesus Himself told His followers that He would willingly lay down His life for them:

I surrender my own life, and no one has the power to take my life from me. I have the authority to lay it down and the power to take it back again. This is the destiny my Father has set before me. (John 10:18)

Why would He do that? Simply because of His love for those enslaved by sin. John 3:16 reminds us:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

And Romans 5:8 echoes that theme:

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)

Isn't this a great story? But there is one more part. This is also the story of:

#3: A PEOPLE WHO RESPOND TO GOD'S LOVE

A love like that cannot and should not be ignored, so the writer of this Epistle encourages his readers by saying:

Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart. For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. (1 Peter 1:22-23)

Sometimes that "born again" language causes angst in people. It evokes images of a TV evangelist and or a street-corner preacher shutting angry messages to those who will listen. But don't pooh-pooh it too quickly. It's a Biblical phrase.

- It describes what happens in the life of someone who responds to the love of God that was shown to them.
- It's as if the person I used to be doesn't exist anymore. Something happens inside of me, and I'm not the same as I was.

You might have seen that play itself out in someone. They start getting serious about matters of faith, and they change. They are different somehow. You might know someone like that. It might describe you. I hope so.

APPLICATION

So there you have it. That's the story. A story of people who were trapped in meaningless lives until God came to set them free. A story of how those people responded to this incredible act of God's love.

It's a great story. But it is more than just a story. It is a story that requires a response from all who hear it.

- When this story was told to the crowd in Acts 2, the Bible says that those listening:

... were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37)

- When this story was told to the couple walking along the road, the Bible says:

"Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"

...causing them to exclaim ...

"It is true! The Lord has risen!"

What's your response?

1. If you have been walking by faith with Jesus, your response ought always to be one of thanksgiving for the gift of eternal life and a renewed pledge to live a life that reflects His presence in your life.
2. If you are not walking by faith with Jesus, I encourage you to start. Right now would be a great time to do that. You might want to pray a simple prayer like this one:

Dear Jesus, Thank You for paying the price to set me free from a life of emptiness and sin. Please come into my heart and make me a new person from the inside out. Amen.

If you prayed that prayer, I encourage you to let me know. At the bottom of your screen you will the address for the Grace website. You will find my picture on the staff page, along with my email address.

And for all of us, whether we have been walking with Jesus for a long time or just now starting, our response should also include a commitment to tell this story to someone else. It's a great story, a story that needs to be told again and again.

Amen.